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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 001694

SIPDIS

EUR/ERA, EUR/WE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/08/2018

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SUBJECT: FUTURE U.S.-EU RELATIONS AND GEORGIA/RUSSIA
DISCUSSED AT AVIGNON GYMNIH

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen Allegrone for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Gathered in Avignon for the Gymnich informal September 5-6, EU Foreign Ministers, the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and European Commission members discussed the future of U.S.-EU relations, updating the European Security Strategy, the Georgia conflict, and next steps on relations with Russia. On future U.S.-EU relations, Ministers and EU officials discussed a draft 8-point plan outlining topics for deepened dialogue with the U.S. While some member states were keen to discuss revisions to the European Security Strategy given recent events in Georgia and the coming change of administration in the U.S., only 10-15 minutes were dedicated to this issue. On Georgia/Russia, Ministers stressed a step-by-step approach to de-escalating the conflict, placing great importance on the outcome of President Sarkozy's September 8 visit to Moscow. No individual member state plans or initiatives related to solving the conflict were reportedly discussed. The French decided not to submit a paper on the Middle East peace process to the other ministers, who, following their discussion of the issue, agreed to a "reinforced" EU engagement on the margins of the upcoming UNGA via the Quartet with the aim of helping sustain the "dynamic" created by the Annapolis process. The next Gymnich meeting will take place in mid-October, focused on continuing the discussion of transatlantic relations. End Summary.

Transatlantic Relations

¶2. (C) On September 5, Ministers and EU officials discussed a draft 8-point plan outlining areas for deepened dialogue with the U.S. These included Afghanistan, Pakistan, MEPP, Iran, Reform in Multilateral Systems, Climate Change, Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights, and International Security. While concluding to shorten the document, Ministers reportedly agreed to move forward on the 8 areas under consideration. While French FM Kouchner and Finnish FM Stubb's public comments suggested that the document would be shared with the U.S. side, to include both presidential candidates, diplomats closer to the discussions said that this would be a "delicate issue" and any timeline for completion remained unclear. Answering repeated questions associated with the U.S. presidential elections and with which candidate the EU would prefer to work, FMs stressed that they looked forward to working with either candidate, highlighting characteristics of each candidate that they thought lent themselves well to transatlantic cooperation. Very positive in tone about the relationship, Kouchner acknowledged Europe and the U.S. would not always see eye-to-eye on issues, suggesting there were "policy differences that enrich the dialogue."

13. (C) While possible revisions to the European Security Strategy were also discussed on September 5, only 10-15 minutes were reportedly dedicated to these discussions. Members close to the discussions said that the revision was being initiated by Swedish FM Bildt, who feared that recent events in Georgia suggested a "return of realpolitik in Europe" and that these developments needed to be reflected in the new strategy. The French reportedly also sought strengthening of ESDP, implying that this was a prerequisite - domestically - for closer relations with NATO. While Bildt stressed that the document written in 2003 did not reflect "the Russia we now see," some member states - especially Germany - were reportedly concerned about redrafting the document because many newer member states - not present for the 2003 discussions - were less likely to approach the situation light handedly.

The Georgian Conflict and Relations with Russia

14. (C) The focus of discussions on September 6 were the Georgia crisis and next steps with Russia. Ministers stressed that resolving the conflict required a step-by-step approach which focused not only on Georgia, but the Caucasus region as a whole. Ministers invited Turkish FM Babacan to attend the first hour of their discussions, Babacan reportedly proposing that a regional conference be held to discuss problems in the region, to include other frozen

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conflicts. Saying EU FMs were unified in their message that "violence was not a method to solve conflicts," Austrian FM Plassnik emphasized that the EU's first priority was to stop the violence, secure a withdrawal of forces (both Russian military and Georgian internal security forces), followed by implementation of the 6-point plan.

15. (C) In keeping with this step-by-step approach, FMs stressed the importance of President Sarkozy's upcoming visit to Moscow September 8. According to some observers, much was riding on the outcome of this visit because there was great debate within the meeting as to how to proceed with Russia. Certain member states reportedly did not want to jeopardize long-term relations with Russia over "small issues like Georgia," the Germans reportedly saying that the EU "shouldn't overreact and jeopardize long term relations." Some observers opined that member states would therefore closely monitor the Sarkozy visit and period leading up to the September 15 GAERC meeting before deciding which message to send. Further underlining this sense that it would take the EU some time to formulate its policy response to Russia, German FM Steinmeier said "we see in the coming weeks the need for many discussions." There was reportedly no discussion of any single member state initiatives.

16. (C) While clearly waiting to see how the Sarkozy visit went, members discussed and decided to move forward on a number of other initiatives to include the EU's civilian monitoring mission to Georgia. While German FM Steinmeier suggested to the press that it was "too early to tell without first speaking with the Georgians and Russians" whether the Georgia mission would be an ESDP mission, a French observer close to the discussions said "France hopes the ESDP mission to Georgia will happen soon," suggesting that the FMs had agreed to move quickly on this. Members also discussed the appointment of a Special Representative for the crisis in Georgia, per the September 1 European Council meeting decision. Swedish observers suggested there were two leading candidates - one French and the other German. While reportedly not discussed, Swedish observers expressed concern about the possible forming of a new contact group to deal with Russia, a format of discussions they felt was not

conducive to EU unity because it allowed "larger EU countries to carve out pieces for themselves and not EU unity." Instead, the Swedes expressed a strong preference for a Quartet-like format, where only one EU representative was present, not many.

Additional Measures

¶7. (C) In contrast to the wait-and-see approach adopted vis-a-vis Russia, members did outline a number of other steps. Saying that because "a stronger Russia must be considered," EU Commissioner for External Relations Ferrero-Waldner said that the EU's Eastern Partnership was being sped up. Saying that she was working bilaterally with countries through the Neighborhood Policy, Ferrero-Waldner added that there was now "a higher priority for frozen conflicts." Austrian FM Plassnik echoed Ferrero-Waldner's statement, saying that a "short term anesthetic approach would not work." Plassnik also said that she and Chancellor Gusenbauer were interested in learning whether any human rights abuses had taken place in Georgia - something she said was still unclear - and had raised this in Brussels September ¶1. In addition to stressing these initiatives, Ferrero-Waldner repeatedly made the case that the EU urgently needed an energy policy.

Middle East Peace Process

¶8. (C) The French MFA, in a press statement on the Gymnich September 8, noted: "Over lunch, the ministers raised reinforcing the European Union's engagement in the Middle East peace process, notably with the prospect of the Quartet meeting that will take place on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly. They agreed on the necessity for the European Union, in the next few months, to play an active role in order to maintain the dynamic created by the Annapolis process." We understand from FM Kouchner's adviser on multilateral and strategic affairs, Philippe Errera, that the French decided not to circulate a paper to the ministers in Avignon. He explained that part of the reasoning was to keep the focus on the transatlantic relations paper, which Errera described as a hopeful exercise in minimizing the

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degree to which the next U.S. administration needs to reexamine and reinvent its relationship with Europe.

Atmospherics

¶9. (C) Member state delegations complained of extremely limited access to the discussions; reportedly only one notetaker from the host nation was allowed access to the discussions. In addition to limited access, some member states felt the review of discussions provided at the end of each session by the host nation notetaker had been "sanitized," resulting in "tough criticism" of the host nation's handling of the access issue, the Czechs reportedly assuring other member states this wouldn't be the case during their upcoming presidency.

Next Meeting

¶10. (SBU) The French intend to host a second Gymnich informal meeting in Paris in mid-October to endorse the transatlantic discussion paper according to Philippe Errera, Strategic Affairs advisor to FM Kouchner, who shared his views with Pol MC on September 8. Errera, who attended the Avignon meeting, said the French will re-work the paper based on input from EU delegations.

¶11. (U) Drafted by USEU with input from CG Marseille and Embassy Paris.

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